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Date: Wednesday, March 31, 1999 9:30 P.M.
Subject: REF.: CIVIL SOCIETY

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Wednesday, March 31, 1999

Gentlemen

Committee of Governmental Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society
C/o Tripartite Committee (Ref. Civil Society)
United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
(ECLAC)
1825 K St. NW, Suite 1120
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Sirs:

Fundación Ambio is a Costa Rican non-governmental organization established in 1989. Fundación Ambio has been closely following the evolution of trade liberalization since the creation of the WTO. Also, we have studied the Regional Accords on American integration, such as the NAFTA, and, of course, the FTAA. By virtue of the public invitation for the participation of civil society in the FTAA process, we hereby state our position.

Fundación Ambio considers that for the purpose of strengthening public support for trade liberalization, transparency in the FTAA process is essential. For the purpose of guaranteeing same and if one wants to take this seriously and not as a rhetorical and formal mechanism, the following measures should be taken as a first step in terms of ACCESS TO INFORMATION. The CGR should implement a policy of access to information which includes:

- A. A policy of non-restriction of information. The following documents should be released immediately after their preparation and distributed to the public at the same time that they are circulated among the negotiating parties:
 - 1. Official and temporary agendas;
 - 2. Official drafts;
 - 3. Temporary and final agreements;
 - 4. Work documents of the Negotiation Groups;
 - 5. Formal and informal contributions of the Members during the negotiation process.
- B. Systematic collection of information. The CGR should see to it that the documents identified in the preceding section are collected, systematized and placed at the

disposition of the public through the respective Ministries of Foreign Trade as well as via the web page.

4/1/99

- C. The citizens may need guidelines for the exercise of their rights. Therefore, eliminating the restriction on documentation is insufficient. The CGR should take affirmative steps, such as the preparation of non-technical summaries, explanatory workshops and conferences that reinforce the possibility of common and informed agreements of the different sectors of civil society.
- D. The participation of organized groups of the society as witnesses and observers of the negotiations should be allowed. In this manner, the pulse of same will be taken directly by the final beneficiary of this whole process: civil society. For these purposes, the CGR should guarantee the convergence of several representatives of each country in the relevant meetings.

We thank you for the opportunity provided. We anxiously await news regarding the direction that this opinion takes within the FTAA process.

Sincerely,

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4/1/99